

RADIO TRANSMUNDANE

Part Ten

**Living as a covert operative
in a futuristic dystopian spy novel.**

Enfin, no more to count on than the number of digits on which to count. The beginning of the end, to be sure, but also the end of a beginning; not just epilogue but prologue. Still bittersweet though, no matter the category.

As an introduction to the Agency, Radio Transmundane is hardly complete or comprehensive but it's a start. I wouldn't recommend taking anything I've included as being authoritative or even correct, mostly due to the limitations of the medium it's created on.

But with the benefit of hindsight I can at least confirm that the Agency's tagline is correct: it's a for-profit secret society of espionage-oriented spiritualists and enthusiasts. It invites alternative thinkers, tinkers, misfits, and mystics; anyone into *spooky, sci-fi, undercover shit!*

In the end the Radio Transmundane file will have been active for an auspicious 567 days, although some not insignificant preliminary work went into it. I did meet Al prior to embarking on the op but he was often more of a catalyst rather than its foundation.

For example, there was one conversation in which he spontaneously introduced the topic of zentens shortly after I'd written about them. Not sure how to go about calculating the odds on that but by then I'd already had enough synchronistic encounters to bother trying.

As is the case with most Agents, Transmundane had been a part of my existence since before birth in one form or another. With episodic anamnesis set to go off at opportune junctures, it would only be a matter of time before I hopped in the saddle. Until then I had to cope with the deep cover trappings of a suburban sleeper lifestyle, i.e. soul-crushing conformity.

Section B was a real kick to the slacks but even so I was only dimly aware of what the Agency was all about. It's a bit like working in a library only to discover that it's actually a front for a shadowy global biblioconspiracy. The knowledge doesn't necessarily change the training or the work, but it sure does the atmosphere.

In this sense, getting acquainted with the Organization was really more of a revelatory dialogue rather than a discovery, a prompted explanation as opposed to mere observation. In short, over time things began to make more sense.

For recruits, Agents, and A-Os, the Org ties together loose ends, answers questions, resolves paradoxes. It's the apocalypse in the traditional sense, knowledge that we realize we've had all along kind of thing.

For example, there's no wrong choice except the one that's known to be wrong. *Right now* is the moment of every choice, and in the next moment the results of that choice are revealed. Maybe that choice is to simply stop reading, or maybe to act, or maybe to just go and watch some TV. So now what?

As with all Agents and A-Os, my primary mission is to infiltrate, gather as much intel as possible, then exfil the fuck out. After that, deep under a duvet cover is usually the only way back in, assuming we want to.

On top of that Agents and A-Os are usually cut off from direct comms with the Org for the duration of the mission, like being submerged under water after a steep cannonball. There's a lot of independence and operational freedom implied in this, as are isolation and risk.

Until the Agent floats back to the surface and toward a dry poolside martini it might seem like water is all there is. By extension, Central Control and The Authority are insistently wet.

Problem is that Control just can't let it go. I mean, it's right there in their name. So the Agency ends up being their nemesis, out of necessity, because the black hole of power abhors its own vacuum.

A one-sided coin is pointless but two sides aren't much better; you need the least likely outcome of a fair coin flip: the edge, the depth, the connection where A-Os conduct most Agency missions, and where handlers and oracles are deployed.

Radio Transmundane is my first extended Agency mission. It's decidedly not my first mission but it's the first one with the Organization to span years.

It's a pretty major operation.

So it's no accident, no stream of consciousness. It's researched, dissected, planned, heavily edited and redacted. Due to certain constraints some mistakes have slipped in but thankfully they're pretty obvious. If they're not obvious, they're probably not mistakes.

A manifesto this ain't and it's not a recruitment pamphlet. It's not an expository work or a reference, not an evidentiary record or an autobiography. Radio Transmundane is one long and detailed requisition, a manifestation of prolonged concentration and purpose.

The Agency is always on the lookout for talent but how would anyone know that such a highly secret organization even exists without some sort of clandestine introduction? So here it is, along with some (mostly) factual examples, proofs, and points of departure.

Turns out that truth is much stranger than any fiction I could conjure up. My main concerns in editing were to maintain cover and security, and to protect the innocent. But anyone who ever featured in Radio Transmundane will be able to recognize themselves. Some may one day come forward to claim their identities. Some I've given reasons not to.

In this espionage world, nothing is what it seems. Things I used to take for granted I no longer can, but I'm stronger for it. I'm less cocky and cavalier, and as a result more confident. It's just paradoxes all the way down.

Does that jibe?

Maybe it's merely another unresolved paradox. It could simply be poor memory. Then again, it might just be me telling it like it is.

Where reasonable, Radio Transmundane was been demarcated in clear and obvious ways with a focus on integrity. Maintaining temporal consistency was one of the reasons snapshots were taken with an archiving service, a valuable process enabling the subsequent extraction of a ton of wacky new stuff from the I-M debriefings. It's the intel that just keeps on giving.

To me that's one of the great aspects of Agency life: the avoidance of pigeonholing. This wouldn't be the first time I've said such a thing but, as previously, it bears repeating - new techniques and technologies are popping up all the time and there's no reason Agents shouldn't avail themselves of them.

We have to take our missions seriously. Operational freedom implies not being limited by the boundaries of conventional equipment and m.o. If it gets the job done, it should be on the short list.

Most Centralites and civvies balk at this. Their minds immediately jump to something violent, or to something irresponsible, maybe damage, destruction, lies, larceny, threats, or ways by which to control and manipulate people.

I. Mean. Seriously.

None of that is what jumps to mind when I talk about unconventional means and approaches. Says a lot more about the people doing the balking, don't it?

My missions simply couldn't be about control. By definition, I wouldn't be a Transmundane Agent. No way could I be an A-O. Just doesn't compute.

Of course anyone can claim to be a five-star Transmundane General but when the proverbial drapes don't match the carpet, you know there's fuckery about. Agents and A-Os deal with this as part of the previously outlined standard operational procedure. To others these distinctions may not be so obvious, even though intel gathering is mostly about common sense.

What sets efficacy apart from earnest farts in the wind is a systematic and holistic approach. Having a broader view of data helps to spot weaknesses, trends, and maybe some surprising correlations. It's yet another thing that separates the amateur from the professional, the recruit from the Agent.

Yeah, Agency life can be a bit demanding. But it can also be rewarding.

Right now there's a dark and stormy night outside my office window. It's late. I'm hunched over the keyboard. Day's been long and the intel in front of me won't transform into something useful by itself.

I'm sipping a cup of trashy instant joe, as if the deal wasn't already sweet enough. And it gets better.

Stark white flashes punctuate the night through the tall trees across the street, occasional tail lights streak red through the staccato of rain on my window.

Two wobbly headlights come to a full stop at the watery street lamp opposite. Huddling from the downpour and pulling up the lapels on their dark trenches, a couple of distorted silhouettes emerge from their vehicle.

This being a Base Of Operations it's naturally hidden behind a respectable façade. Visitors to the adjoining properties are not uncommon, even when it's pissing out there. But these two fellows look a little different. My Agent-y senses are tingling.

Sure enough, they emerge from the narrow alley into which they disappeared not more than thirty seconds before, and abruptly drive off. If this isn't another Agency caper with potential written all over it, I don't know what is.

I can't go running after every lead and whisper but when it's obvious or involves a couple of "coincidences", I take notice. Often intel doesn't become actionable for a while so I end up sitting on it and wondering what the heck it's for, much like that swamp shack thing.

Eventually though, the mysterious ways of the Agency plunk me in some situation, at some place, at some time, and right then and there things link up. That's why something like the Journal is so useful. When that random synchronistic dead drop or piece of mission intel pull a déjà vu, I know exactly where to go for a cross-reference.

This often leads to the clichéd rabbit hole except that alongside Alice often appear Bob and Eve. It may be cryptic but it's rarely a dull journey and what comes out of it could very well Jabberwock a future operation. Occasionally it seems that mission intel produces nothing of value, only to later have it assume a pivotal role in something else.

In the meantime, intelligence doesn't gather itself so I'm concomitantly out in the field, walking the rounds, making new friends, etc. Things sometimes still get physical, it's just now there's more behind-the-scenes work.

Life being like a box of chocolates is not very accurate. Chocolatiers usually want you have a pretty good idea of what you're gonna get if you look under the lid, on the bottom of the box, or over the elegant picture card floating around inside.

Of course you have to think to look, which is where most civvies fall short. Central, forget about it.

Obviously you don't get all the answers this way but many bonbons are clearly identifiable. Other times you can flip the box around and have a peek at the ingredient list, maybe find a nutritional analysis, grab the web site or a contact for more information.

Or you could look outside the box.

Again, not a thing many civvies and Centralites are willing to do. They'll offer all sorts of platitudes for this, proving only that horses can be led to water. Not only could they drink if they wanted to, they could also swim.

In the sphere of the domesticated bovine this is analogous to the virtual cattle grid, a series of painted parallel lines which look to cattle like hoof-sized grooves in the road leading into their enclosure. Not wanting to injure themselves on the treacherous-looking surface, this optical illusion keeps the cows in the corral ... until one of them decides to risk it.

Sometimes the herd will follow the breakaway example. This is called the "smart cow problem", although clearly the problem is Control's. Typically Central will then go round up the escapees, which would be a lot easier if they themselves didn't believe in the dangers of painted lines.

Some lines are meant to be crossed. Some bubbles are meant to be burst.

At one point I asked him and Al said he'd "already done the radio thing" so he wasn't keen on having the recordings of our conversations made public. But writing about them from my perspective would be fine; encouraged, in fact.

I'd hoped to be able to use the audio so this really threw a wrench into my bubble. I even had an intro featuring recordings of some neat numbers stations, but it was not to be. Not in that way.

I went through written version after written version. Even with all my "citizen journalist" experience it would take something more radical to arrive at the final approach.

That "something more radical" shouldn't be discussed in polite company so it'll have to remain classified. Suffice it to say that it required some planning and some very late nights.

And sacrifices.

Not the blood kind. Some sweat. A few tears. There was stuff I had to let go of but the trade-offs were fair. As mentioned, the Agency isn't in the habit of providing mansions and lamboes for A-Os but in my experience, unless it's a safehouse it bats above average in creature comforts.

In the final tally, challenges are simply part of the story, which when you think about it would be pretty boring otherwise. Agency membership implies a few advantages heading in but no amount of training can fully prepare you for the vagaries of living deep under cover.

I had some early advantages in that my visions of the future were always a bit dystopian. Whether it was my choice of movie, music, or book, there was always a *noir* feel to it.

I don't limit that word to only lighting technique, cinematography, musical score, or somber nuance. To me it's about moral ambiguity, about not walking away from the thing with well-defined good or bad. It's a hanging question mark.

My noir is the portentous feeling of an overcast afternoon, when a storm hangs in the distance. The air is charged with shadows and omens, the atmosphere dense with energy and possibilities.

Later it's the dark, rainy memory of a train car clacking over an iron bridge somewhere in Eastern Europe, dimly lit outlines of smokestacks, warehouses, and loading docks moving by slowly in the murky distance, deep bass of an invisible cargo ship's foghorn shaking the train window from somewhere in the blackness below. That's my noir.

Misty darkness really sets the mood for an evening of espionage. It hugs like a smoking jacket and a third martini. Also it's usually cooler; as much as I enjoyed my stint in Southeast Asia, I could do without the heat.

It's like going mushroom picking with my dad, a pastime from the old country. It would always be on a cool, soggy, cloudy day because that's when the mushrooms are at their best - pert, glossy caps gleaming in the early morning light, set against a lazy forest mist hanging just above the ground. Magical.

In my native tongue there's a single, sensible word for the fungal web connecting mushrooms beneath the forest floor. It's a lot more to the point than "common mycorrhizal network".

Every mushroom is unique but they'll often pop up out of this shared subterranean source in groups. "Where there's one," my dad use to say, "there are usually more. Move slowly and keep your eyes open."

An invisible web running under the cover of the forest floor, in it but not of it, a foundation connecting seemingly isolated organisms. And above ground a misty, numinous mysterium.

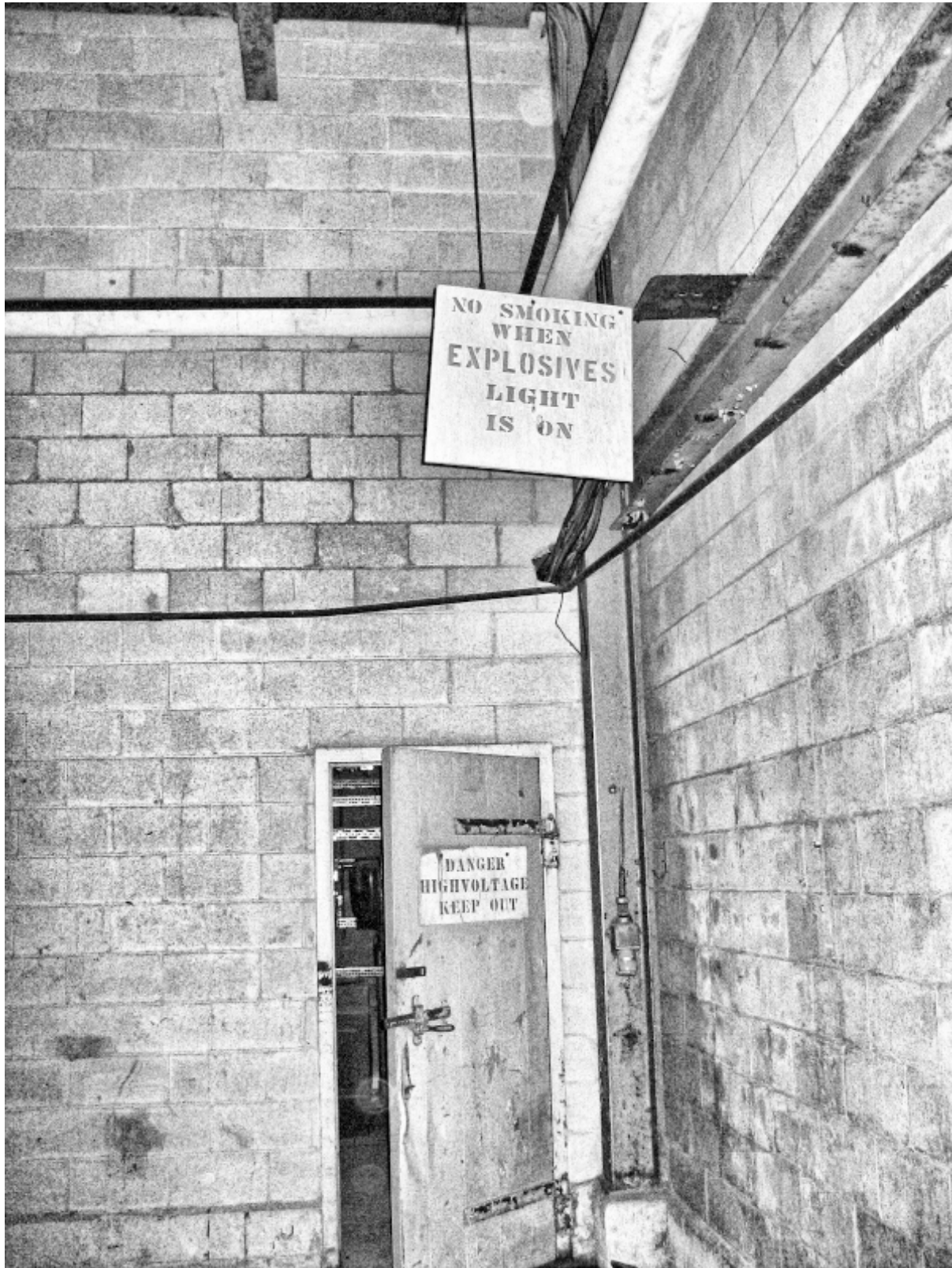
At this point, spelling anything out seems unwise and unnecessary so this is where I'll end the spiel. A couple of childhood memories and a foggy runway that's quickly running out seem like a good a place as any to wrap things up. This bird's about to take off and Agents don't do sappy speeches on tarmacs. Not like it's the end anyway.

Unfortunately there simply isn't enough Radio Transmundane for everything I wanted to include but a modicum of independent effort is expected. There should be enough coarse material to give a lift to recruits and junior Agents, and anyone else with whom it connects.

As a final reminder, some of the information may have been altered or redacted for privacy and security.

FIN

_ / JOURNAL B - TERMINATE PROJECT \ _



... FREEDOM FROM THE SHADOWS ... STAY COVERT ...

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